



The well-secured catboats used by the Chesapeake Region's Accessible Boating program (far left) shined at the U.S. Sailboat Show in Annapolis, Md. The Herreshoff-style four-bolt cleat (inset, from J.D. Reiser and Sons) is a functional and elegant design. A creatively cleated line (left) on a boat-show Beneteau reflects . . . creativity?

Ode to the Long-forgotten Deck Cleat

The devastating train of hurricanes that rolled through Florida in 2004 and 2005 gave engineers an opportunity to see firsthand what happens when a modern boat's mooring points and lines are pushed to their limits.

A post-mortem look at many lost boats revealed shocking design and construction oversights that contributed to the carnage. Buttonhole-size chocks made it impossible to add chafe gear. Sharp turns at chocks and hawseholes sawed lines until they broke. Tiny, poorly installed cleats yanked free from soggy, cored decks. Cheap cast aluminum cleats riddled with air pockets simply snapped.

This month's look at the cleats found on today's production boats revealed a disturbing trend: A fashion-conscious quest for aesthetic appeal is displacing function as a priority. The trend isn't new, nor is it just reserved to cleats. In fact, I could easily point to any number of features on boats past and present that don't

make a lick of sense once the boat leaves a dock.

My pet peeve: huge cabin windows and poorly reinforced coachroofs. Sure the view is nice at the anchorage . . . but it loses its appeal when the green water comes rushing through a gaping hole after a knockdown.

Obviously, not every boat is intended to cross an ocean nor to carry weeks worth of food and supplies, so I can forgive a builder whose weekender is short a sea berth, or who sacrifices storage space for an air-conditioner compressor. These days, I'm more surprised than not to see a truly impressive voyager at a boat show.

But the degree to which the pursuit of a pretty, "marketable," boat is changing one of the most essential pieces of deck hardware shocked even me. Whether that boat is a trailerable daysailer or a cape-rounding voyager, it must at some time be anchored, moored, or tied to a dock. A boat needs cleats and those cleats need to be large, well-placed, and adequately

reinforced. It's that simple.

When I first read Technical Editor Ralph Naranjo's cleat report, I had a hard time believing that this was the state of the boatbuilding industry today. Was it really that bad? Was the rugged, elegant, and dead-simple Herreshoff four-bolt cleat (above left) bound for extinction? Only when I started reviewing Ralph's photos of boats secured at last year's U.S. Boat Show in Annapolis, Md., did I really begin to worry.

Not only were good cleats in short supply, so were—sadly—people who knew how to use them. Let's hope it won't take another killer storm season to jog their memories.

Cover photo: Editor Darrell Nicholson sluices antifouling test panels prior to evaluation. (Photo by Ann Key.)

Photos by Ralph Naranjo

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